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INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3670
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 9880
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4284
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0151
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0060
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0162
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 3880
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2147
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0239
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000117

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SUBJECT: BOXING CHAMP CHAGAEV TO MARRY GULNORA KARIMOVA?

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) Summary: On January 23, the Newsuz.com website reported that Uzbek boxing champ Ruslan Chagaev has been linked romantically with the President's daughter, Gulnora Karimova. However, the Uzmtronom website reported on January 28 that Chagaev planned to immigrate to Germany and made no mention of a relationship with Karimova. Separately, the daughter of Gulnora's sister Lola has reportedly developed a serious bone disease and is seeking treatment in Europe. It is impossible for us to verify any of these rumors, but it is interesting to note that Chagaev's popularity among the Uzbek elite has dimmed considerably in recent months, possibly due to either his alleged ties to Gulnora Karimova or his supposed plans to emigrate from Uzbekistan. End summary.

12. (C) On January 23, the Newsuz.com website reported that Uzbek boxing champ Ruslan Chagaev, who won the World Boxing Association (WBA) heavyweight title in April 2007, has been linked romantically with Gulnora Karimova, President Karimov's elder daughter. It further speculated that Chagaev was in the process of divorcing his wife and would soon marry Karimova. Poloff was told the same information in November by a well-connected contact, former Uch-Tepe district deputy Hokim (mayor) Adolat Nasirova. In November, a contact of political FSN also reported seeing Chagaev in court engaging in divorce proceedings.

BACKLASH BREWING AGAINST CHAGAEV?

13. (C) The January 23 Newsuz.com article reported that Chagaev's affair with Karimova has resulted in a backlash among "upper-level" officials, who then ordered state-controlled media outlets not to cover Chagaev's successful January 19 title defense in Germany. Public affairs FSNs confirmed that Chagaev's successful defense of his title was scarcely covered in the state-controlled Uzbek

media (though the match was aired on Russian TV), starkly contrasting with the hero's welcome given to Chagaev in April 2007 after he won the WBA heavyweight title. After returning home from that bout, Chagaev was met at the airport by President Karimov himself and his face was plastered on billboards across Tashkent for weeks.

...OR DOES CHAGAEV PLAN TO IMMIGRATE TO GERMANY?

14. (U) On January 28, the independent Uzmtronom website, citing unspecified sources, reported that Chagaev is planning to immigrate to Germany with his family and may possibly give up his Uzbek citizenship. The article notes that Chagaev would join other famous Uzbek sportsmen in exile, including gymnast Oksana Chusovitino and world-champion chess player Rustam Kasimzhanov. It also made no mention of Chagaev's alleged relationship with Karimova or any plans to divorce his wife.

LOLA KARIMOVA'S DAUGHTER REPORTEDLY DEVELOPS BONE DISEASE

15. (C) A local Embassy employee, whose daughter used to be in the same class in school as the daughter of Lola Karimova (Gulnora Karimova's younger sister), told poloff that Lola's daughter was diagnosed with a serious bone disorder and is no longer attending the school. The local Embassy employee was told by the class teacher that Lola's daughter developed an unspecified disease by which her bones were growing faster than the rest of her body and that she was being treated by doctors in Germany.

16. (C) On January 10, Uzmtronom reported that Lola Karimova accepted a position with the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) headquarters in Paris. The head of the UNESCO delegation in Tashkent confirmed the story to poloff on January 27. In August, poloff was also told by Free Farmers Party Leader Nigara Khidoyatova (who often passes on rumors about the ruling family) that Lola was spending a lot of time in Paris with her common-law husband Timur and her daughter. (Comment: If the information about her daughter is correct, then it is possible that Lola Karimova has moved to Europe while her daughter is being treated. It is also possible that the daughter is actually being treated in France, rather than Germany, as alleged by the teacher. End Comment.)

COMMENT

17. (C) It is impossible to confirm any of these rumors. The lack of press coverage for Chagaev's recent successful title bout in Germany appears to indicate that his once rising star has dimmed considerably in recent months, possibly due to an association with Karimova, who is unpopular in Tashkent and widely viewed as a rapacious businesswoman. Although she presumably enjoys the support of her father, observers believe that through her unscrupulous business dealings, she has made many powerful enemies, including National Security Service Chairman Rustam Inoyatov and reputed mob boss Gafur Rakhimov (from whom she allegedly wrested away one of her companies, the Zeromax corporation). Another possibility is that GOU officials became aware of Chagaev's alleged plans to move to Germany, and therefore limited media coverage of his most recent bout, knowing that the departure of another famous sportsman would be a grave embarrassment for Uzbekistan's elites.

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